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A Typology of Older Prisoners in Massachusetts State Correctional Facilities 1972 to 1982

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Massachusetts Department of Correction

Michael V. Fair
Commissioner

August, 1983

PUBLICATION #:13419
Approved by Daniel Carter, State Purchasing Agent

334/10

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Abstract

This research develops and tests a conceptual typology of older prisoners on a sample of male and female inmates age 60 and over who were in the Massachusetts state correctional system between 1972 and 1982. The typology characterizes four types of older prisoners: Type I--the first offender; Type II--the chronic offender; Type III--the prison recidivist; and Type IV--the inmate grown old. Of the 106 inmates which met the age criteria of the study (96 men and 10 women), almost half of the sample--52 cases--conformed to the description of the Type III offender, the prison recidivist.

Introduction

Prisoners are characteristically young adults. Recent age profiles of incarcerated populations reveal that approximately 75 percent of the inmates in state institutions are age 18 to 24 (Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics--1981). This age distribution contrasts sharply with the age distribution of the total U.S. population in which less than 15 percent of the public falls between the ages of 18 to 24 (Census of Population, 1980). Given that inmate populations are much younger than the general population it would be surprising, indeed, to find many older persons in prison. In fact, older inmates typically constitute such a small part of the prison population that their presence may be dismissed as insignificant to the overriding concerns of security and control in the institution; consequently, they easily may become a forgotten minority.

Krajick (1979) reports in two studies that one percent of all U.S. prisoners are age 60 and older, and slightly over one-half of one percent are age 65 and older. In the Massachusetts state correctional system the percentages of older inmates are comparable to the national figures; as of January 1, 1982, 40 inmates were age 60 and older (1 percent of the prison population) and 11 prisoners were 65 and older (0.3 percent of the population). The presence of this small group of senior inmates, contrasting so sharply in age from the age of the modal

prisoner raises a number of questions, two of which will be dealt with in this paper: (1) do older prisoners constitute a homogeneous minority; and (2) what type of criminal career patterns commonly describe the older offender population?

Some studies have attempted to develop a psychological and sociological profile of the older inmate. The older offender, on the one hand, is described as "competent, responsive, quick and shrewd" (Wiegand and Burger, 1979-80: 49). On the other hand, studies have found that older prisoners tend to be more anxious and depressed (Bergman and Amir, 1973), express greater fears of inadequacy and insecurity, and function at lower levels of intelligence (Panton, 1976) than younger prisoners. The contrasting image of the older inmate extends to descriptions of the role these individuals play in the inmate population. While some studies depict the older inmate as a stabilizing, rational force among the younger prisoners suppressing the more volatile aggressive tendencies of the prison population, other accounts suggest that older inmates are loners, victimized by younger prisoners, isolated from the mainstream of prison life and prison activities and are extremely dependent upon prison staff (Krajick, 1979; Rubenstein, 1982). It is apparent that the existing literature can offer little consensus on the profile of the older inmate.

The lack of consonant profiles of the older inmate may stem from different types of senior citizens admitted to prison. Wiegand and Berger (79-80) and Teller and Howell (1981) identify two distinctive types of elderly offenders: (1) the first offender--an elderly person who commits a first offense after a lifetime of being a law-abiding citizen; and (2) the chronic offender--a recidivist who has spent many years in and out of prison. These two types of older inmates tend to respond differently to the prison environment (Rubenstein, 1982). First

offenders, having stronger ties to the outside community, are likely to resist socialization into the prison system, whereas older recidivists whose criminal backgrounds closely resemble those of younger inmates, more readily assimilate into the prison culture and show the same degree of adjustment as their younger counterparts (Teller and Howell, 1981). The multi-incarcerated older offender may evidence greater integration into the prison system and exercise more influence over younger inmates because of past experiences and familiarity with prison life.

The classification of older inmates into first offenders and recidivists is helpful in accounting for some of the contradictions and discrepancies found in the profile of the elderly inmate described above. However, the bipolar typology itself is inadequate in certain respects. That is, the first offender-recidivist typology does not encompass all "types" of older offenders in prison; certain logical types are missing from this typology. For example, which of the existing types describes the individual who reveals a history of minor offenses and violations of the law, but is never committed to a state prison until later in life? Similarly, how does the bipolar typology classify the inmate who was incarcerated for a serious offense when young and then grew old in prison? Even assuming that the older first offender and the older recidivist do not exist as absolute types it is unclear whether all older inmates should be subsumed under these types or whether a new classification system should be generated.

In order to obtain a more complete picture of the "older prisoner" this study will examine the characteristics and criminal history of inmates age 60 and older in the Massachusetts correctional system between 1972 and 1982.

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Providing a detailed description of the older inmate population will serve either to support the bipolar typology (first offender-recidivist) or to suggest the need for an alternative system of classifying older inmates. Despite the small size of the elderly inmate population, attention to the attributes and criminal career patterns of this group could prove useful in understanding prospects for institutional adjustment and receptivity to rehabilitation attempts.

Statement of Purpose

This study is concerned with describing the population of older inmates in the Massachusetts state correctional system. The purpose of identifying the salient characteristics of this group is twofold: (1) to assess the fit of the bipolar typology offered in the literature (elderly first offender versus elderly recidivist); and (2) to explore the utility of an alternative descriptive system of classification.

The bipolar typology appears to derive from an examination of court commitments or institutional admission records of elderly offenders. Such a technique, by definition, omits the younger offender who has grown old in prison. Other types of older offenders might also be overlooked by relying exclusively on the bipolar typology as a method of classification. The objectives of this study is to expand the bipolar typology to include categories which will cover other possible types of older inmates. If the range of older inmates in prison, in fact, warrants an alternative classification, then contrasts in the

types should reflect differences in personal background characteristics and criminal history. The adequacy of the existing bipolar typology will be determined on the basis of whether the "non-types" can be subsumed under the first offender/recidivist categories or whether the "non-types" differ enough to retain them as separate categories.

Typologies have proven useful in research as techniques for data reduction and descriptive analysis. One of the objectives of this research is to test an alternative system of classifying older inmates. Two dimensions form the basis of the alternative typology, (1) age at first state prison commitment and (2) prior adult convictions. The cross-classification of older inmates according to these two dimensions produces four possible types of older prisoner (see Figure 1): Type I, the "first offender"; (2) Type II, the "chronic offender"; (3) Type III, the "prison recidivist"; and (4) Type IV, the "young offender grown old" in prison. Inmates who are admitted to prison for the first time at older ages and have no previous convictions are considered "first offenders". Individuals with a history of incarcerations in a house of correction or multiple criminal charges who are first imprisoned in a state institution late in life are labeled "chronic offenders". The "prison recidivist" category consists of older inmates who have a record of multiple state and federal incarcerations beginning at a young age. The fourth category includes inmates imprisoned when young who received long sentences and grew old in prison. The typology permits comparison of the four types of older inmates in terms of personal background characteristics, criminal history, offense characteristics, and furlough participation.

Figure 1. Conceptual Typology of Incarcerated Older Prisoners

Age At First State Prison Commitment	Adult Convictions Prior To Last Confinement: No Prior Criminal Record	Adult Convictions Prior To Last Confinement: Prior Criminal Record
Middle Age	First Offender (Type I)	Chronic Offender (Type II)
Young Adulthood	Offender Grown Old (Type IV)	Prison Recidivist (Type III)

Methodology

This study draws upon records of inmates in the Massachusetts correctional system between 1972 and 1982. Information on admissions, releases and the resident population at the beginning of each year for the 10 year period formed the basis for deriving the study sample. The sample consists of: (1) all offenders age 60 and over who were in prison on January first of each year between 1973 and 1982, (2) all offenders age 60 and over who were released each year between 1972 and 1981, and (3) all offenders admitted between 1972 and 1981 who were age 60 and over. It was necessary to examine all three sets of information--yearly admissions, yearly releases, and resident population at the beginning of each year--in order to include all older prisoners (defined in this study as any inmate age 60 and over) who were in the Massachusetts correctional system between 1972 and 1982. Each older prisoner was counted only once in the sample despite the fact that any one of them might appear as an admission one year, a released offender another year, and as a point-in-time resident for several years. This sampling technique yielded 106 inmates age 60 and over in state correctional institutions during the 10 year period; 96 of the older inmates were men and 10 were women.

In order to carry out the analysis the 106 senior inmates were each assigned to one of the four categories of the conceptual typology (two of the four categories are equivalent to the bipolar types identified in the literature.[1] The following specifications constitute the operational definitions of the four types of senior prisoners. Inmates were classified as "first offenders" if

they had been incarcerated only once and were committed for the first time after age 50 and had no prior adult incarcerations nor previous criminal charges other than the one(s) pertaining to the existing incarceration. Inmates confined for the first time after age 50 with no previous state or federal incarcerations, but with multiple convictions or house of correction and/or jail sentences were classified as "chronic offenders". The "prison recidivist" category includes senior inmates with multiple state or federal incarcerations (including time served in state prisons outside of Massachusetts), or with adult parole violations on a single sentence leading to reincarceration. In some cases the difference between a "prison recidivist" and a "chronic offender" was determined solely on the basis of how the former sentence(s) was served (i.e., in prison, in a house of correction, or on probation). Inmates imprisoned over a period of at least 12 consecutive years and incarcerated before the age of 50 are classified as inmates who have "grown old" in prison. This latter group would have reached "old age" sometime after they last entered prison.[2]

The criteria used for assigning older females to categories of the typology differ slightly from those used to assign males. This variation was necessary because it was impossible to draw comparable samples of older male and female prisoners. Traditionally women were confined to the state correctional institution for women for such offenses as drunkenness, disturbing the peace, adultery and so on -- offenses for which men ordinarily were confined in houses of correction. Female prisoners who served time for these offenses in the past would have records which showed prior state commitments even though they may have been incarcerated for only 6 months to a year. More recently the state prison for women has been used to house female offenders with county sentences (sentences of less than 2½ years). In light of these historical and administrative differences

in the correctional treatment of female offenders, the records of women were examined to determine whether they were sentenced for 2½ years or more. Any sentence of less than 2½ years was treated as the equivalent of a jail or house of correction commitment. Consequently, of the five women who had multiple state incarcerations, two had the equivalent of state commitments and three had the equivalent of county commitments. The three older female inmates with the county sentences were assigned to the "chronic offender" category.

The length of time served on the most recent sentence and the age of the inmate when the commitment commenced are the critical factors differentiating prison recidivists and first offenders from senior inmates who have grown old in prison. For example, a felon might be admitted to prison on a first offense at age 55, serve 11 years of his sentence and be classified as a "first offender" because of his age at initial incarceration. In another situation, an inmate may have served 15 years of a sentence, been released at age 40, and imprisoned again on another charge at age 60. This inmate would be classified a "prison recidivist" because he had not actually "grown old" in prison even though he had served a lengthy sentence during part of his adult life. These cases illustrates the somewhat arbitrary nature of the classification system. Because the study deals with a fixed period of time, a follow-up of the inmate sample might result in a slightly different assignment of inmates to the various categories of the typology. In other words, at a later period in time "first offenders" might become "prison recidivists" and "prison recidivists" might have "grown old". Although the typology is temporal in nature, it is offered in the present study as a useful technique for differentiating the older inmate population.

The two dimensions discussed earlier--age at first state commitment and prior adult convictions--formulate the criteria for the fourfold typology. Tables A and B in the Appendix present variables which are indicators of the abstract dimensions of the typology. The ability of the indicator variables to differentiate among the four categories of older inmates offers some confidence in the reliability of the operational definitions as measures of the abstract dimensions. Indicators such as the age variables, former commitments, and time served were calculated by the researcher from dates available in the prison records on each senior inmate. Included in the calculation of time served were the years actually spent in prison between the effective date of the first commitment to the release date of the last commitment or December, 1982, if the inmate was incarcerated at the time of the study.

It is apparent from Tables A and B that various indicators of the conceptual dimensions do distinguish among senior inmates, especially among males, in the expected way. In most cases discussion of the typology will focus on the findings from the male inmates in the sample. The deviation of the distribution of female inmates from the general pattern of male inmates and the small number of women representing each type preclude a separate analysis of senior female inmates.

Consistent with the classification system, prison recidivists and offenders grown old are incarcerated at younger ages and have spent more time in prison (see "median age at first incarceration" and "mean years served" in Tables A and B in the Appendix). The number of years served in prison ranges from 1 to 15 years and from 1 to 16 years for male first offenders and chronic offenders, respectively, and ranges from 3 to 45 years for male prison recidivists and from 14 to 53 years for men grown old. Age at first incarceration ranges from age 54

to 67 inclusive among Type I, age 52 to 76 among Type II, age 16 to 64 among Type III and age 19 to 48 among Type IV older inmates. Previous adult incarcerations most clearly characterize the prison recidivists. Approximately 55 of the chronic offenders (male and female) reveal prior adult incarcerations, but these refer to county and municipal jail terms not state or federal prison commitments in the case of men and state commitments for county sentences in the case of women. The relatively high percentage of those grown old with a history of prior adult incarcerations indicates that most of these inmates were repeat offenders before being incarcerated for long terms.

In most instances, the criterion variables distinguish among the types of senior inmates along the lines suggested by the abstract dimensions--age at first state commitment and prior adult convictions. The weakest fit is between the theoretical inmate "grown old" and the actual attributes of older inmates in the Massachusetts system falling into this category. While the results of the empirical indicators do not suggest mutually exclusive categories of older prisoners, the typology represents a convenient mechanism for classifying senior inmates.

Findings

Table 1 shows how the four inmate types are distributed among the 106 prisoners age 60 and older in the Massachusetts state correctional system between 1972 and 1982. As can be seen, the predominant type of older inmate is the prison recidivist, making up 49 percent of the 106 cases. The first offender

Table 1

Senior Inmate Type By
Gender of Inmate

Inmate Type	Males	Females	Total
Type I First Offender	14 (15)	5 (50)	19 (18)
Type II Chronic Offender	19 (20)	3 (30)	22 (21)
Type III Prison Recidivist	50 (52)	2 (20)	52 (49)
Type IV Grown Old	13 (13)	0 (0)	13 (12)
TOTAL	96	10	106

and the chronic offender have almost an equal chance of appearing, comprising 18 percent and 21 percent of the sample respectively. When male and female older offenders are examined separately the distribution of types differs somewhat. Among older male prisoners (96 cases) the prison recidivist is still the most common type (50 cases), the chronic offender follows as the second most common type (19 cases), and the first offender (14 cases) and inmates grown old (13 cases) constitute the smaller segments of the male sample. Older female prisoners fall into only three categories of the typology. The most common type of older female inmate is the first offender. The data on the women should be viewed with caution, however, since the sample is too small to support any firm generalizations about this group.

A number of inmate characteristics and offense-related variables will be examined in terms of the fourfold typology in the following tables. The objective of this analysis is to provide descriptive profiles of the four types of older inmates and to determine whether the differences between the four groups are significant enough to retain the separate types or whether the typology should be collapsed into the original dichotomy--first offenders and recidivist.

The personal background characteristics of inmates, offense variables, and release variables reported in Tables 2-5 refer to conditions at the time of the most recent period of state incarceration. Much of the background information is self-reported and is not verified. Table 2 presents the distribution of selected personal background characteristics for the four types of senior inmates. Although the majority of senior inmates are white, slightly more non-white inmates (23 percent) are found among "chronic offenders" and "grown old", respectively. First offenders

Table 2

Selected Personal Background Characteristics
By Type of Older Inmate

Background Characteristics	Senior Inmate Types: First Offender	Chronic Offender	Prison Recidivist	Offender Grown Old	Total
White	16	17	44	10	87
Percent	(84)	(77)	(85)	(77)	(82)
Married at Time of Most Recent Commitment	10	9	15	1	35
Percent	(53)	(41)	(29)	(8)	(33)
Military Service Experience	4	11	19	4	38
Percent	(21)	(50)	(36)	(31)	(36)
5 Years or More at Most Skilled Job	12	11	16	2	41
Percent	(63)	(50)	(31)	(15)	(39)
High School Education	11	8	12	2	33
Percent	(58)	(36)	(23)	(15)	(31)
Manual Trades as Primary Occupation	4	7	26	7	44
Percent	(21)	(32)	(50)	(54)	(42)
TOTAL CASES	19	22	52	13	106
Percent	(18)	(21)	(49)	(12)	(100)

and chronic offenders are more likely to have been married at the time of commitment than the other two types of offenders. This finding may be indicative of the difficulty in sustaining marriage and family relationships with repeated incarcerations. For example, 44 percent of the prison recidivists were divorced or separated at the time of their last commitment. Moreover, the finding may also reflect life cycle characteristics as well as institutional history of those inmates committed at younger ages--62 percent of the offenders grown old had never been married by the time of their most recent incarceration.

The social status backgrounds of the four types of senior inmates evidence some interesting differences. First offenders and chronic offenders reveal more years of schooling and generally have spent longer periods of time at one given job than other types of older inmates. Manual work tends to be the modal type of occupation for older prisoners. However, experience in the manual trades tends to be much more characteristic of prison recidivists or offenders grown old than first or chrnoic offenders. Among first offenders and chronic offenders about a third (32 percent in each category) held white collar positions prior to their most recent and only state incarceration. The occupational background of the older women is unknown in many cases (40 percent), but, among those for which it has been reported, manual and service jobs are the most common. It appears from the distribution of characteristics in Table 2 that first offenders and chronic offenders come from more stable employment and marital backgrounds and exhibit somewhat higher social status in terms of educational and occupational indi-ators than prison recidivists and inmates grown old. These findings are consistent with those reported by Rubenstein (1982) on the differences in the profiles of the elderly first offender and the multiply incarcerated elderly offender.

Table 3

Type of Offense at Time of Most Recent Incarceration
By Type of Older Male Inmate

Type of Present Offense	First Offense N = 14	Chronic Offender N = 19	Prison Recidivist N = 50	Offender Grown Old N = 13	Total N = 96
Person	10	11	31	12	64
	(71)	(58)	(62)	(92)	(67)
Sex	1	5	7	1	14
	(7)	(26)	(14)	(8)	(15)
Property	0	1	8	0	9
	(0)	(5)	(16)	(0)	(9)
Drug	0	1	3	0	4
	(0)	(5)	(6)	(0)	(4)
Other	3	1	1	0	5
	(21)	(5)	(2)	(0)	(5)

( ) Refers to column percents. These may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 3 presents the category of offense--person, sex, property, drug or other offense--for which older male inmates were serving time during their latest incarceration. Since person and sex offenses are the most common type of offense among older male prisoners, Table 4 permits a closer examination of these two offense categories for men. Tables were not included to display the offense patterns of older women because of their small sample size. However, of the ten senior female inmates, three were most recently incarcerated for manslaughter, one for armed assault, one for unarmed assault, one for injury to property, one for a Class-A drug offense, and three for "other" offenses (disturbing the peace, contempt of court and drunkenness). It is important to note that the nature and distribution of offenses leading to incarceration of older women in a state prison vary greatly from those leading to incarceration of older men.

Unlike the social background variables which exhibit similarities between first offenders and chronic offenders on the one hand and between prison recidivists and offenders grown old on the other hand, the offense variables reveal quite distinct patterns for the four groups of senior male inmates. Table 3 indicates that the majority of senior male offenders are likely to be serving sentences for some kind of "person" offense. However, prison recidivists reveal a relatively high proportion of recent incarcerations for property crimes. Murder convictions seem to characterize male offenders who have grown old in prison, while manslaughter and sex offenders are found slightly more often among "chronic offenders" (see Tables 3 and 4). In general the inmates experiencing repeat commitments (prison recidivists) are incarcerated for many more varied crimes than the other types of older male prisoners. While most of the first

Table 4

Person and Sex Offenses By
Type of Senior Male Inmate

Person/Sex Offense of Most Recent Conviction	First Offender N = 11	Chronic Offender N = 16	Prison Recidivist N = 38	Offender Grown Old N = 13	Total Person/Sex Offenders N = 78
Murder - 1	2 (18)	2 (12)	3 (8)	5 (38)	12 (15)
Murder - 2	2 (18)	1 (6)	5 (13)	7 (54)	15 (19)
Manslaughter	4 (36)	8 (50)	10 (26)	0 (0)	22 (28)
Armed Assault & Assault/Intent to Murder	2 (18)	0 (0)	2 (5)	0 (0)	4 (5)
Armed Robbery	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (26)	0 (0)	10 (13)
Conspiracy	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (3)	0 (0)	1 (1)
Rape & Assault/ Intent to Rape	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (5)	0 (0)	2 (3)
Rape-Minor & Assault/Intent to Rape Minor	1 (9)	5 (31)	5 (13)	1 (8)	12 (15)

( ) Refers to column percents. These may not total to 100% due to rounding.

offenders are/were serving time for murder, manslaughter or assault, three (21 percent) were incarcerated for a non-person crime, extortion.

Although the frequencies in the cells of Tables 2,3 and 4 are too small to produce reliable statistics, it is interesting to note that first offenders are similar to chronic offenders in terms of social characteristics, but tend to be serving time for the kinds of crimes that led to the incarceration of offenders grown old. The types of crimes for which chronic male offenders were incarcerated do not closely parallel the offense patterns of any of the other types of older male inmates, and the prison recidivists are quite distinct in terms of the range of crimes and the prevalence of property crimes.

There might be some question at this point as to whether the most recent convictions of the 50 male "prison recidivists" characterize their earlier offense pattern. Examination of past state and federal incarcerations for this group indicates that about a third (16 inmates) were imprisoned earlier for a different crime. The rest were either incarcerated multiple times for the same offense (14 inmates), returned to prison for parole violation or escape (10 inmates), or imprisoned for a crime similar in nature to their last offense (10 inmates). The combination of armed robbery and breaking and entering/larceny appeared fairly often and were treated as similar offenses even though armed robbery involves the use of force or threat of force or violence. Like comparable property offenses, armed robbery is usually motivated by material gain and the intent to deprive another of property. In general the criminal histories of the prison recidivists reveal fairly stable patterns of criminal involvement, indicating that their current offense reflects, with some accuracy, their criminal past. Hence, in the aggregate, current offense is a useful comparative measure to assess similarities and differences between types of older inmates.

Table 5

Total Number of Furloughs
for Older Male Inmates

Total Furloughs For All Incarcerations	First Offender	Chronic Offender	Prison Recidivist	Offender Grown Old	Total
None	7 (50)	4 (21)	14 (28)	3 (23)	28 (29)
One	1 (7)	0 (0)	6 (12)	3 (23)	10 (10)
2 to 5	1 (7)	4 (21)	9 (18)	2 (15)	16 (17)
6 to 10	3 (21)	4 (21)	6 (12)	2 (15)	15 (16)
11 to 30	1 (7)	3 (16)	8 (16)	1 (8)	13 (14)
More Than 30	1 (7)	4 (21)	7 (14)	2 (15)	14 (14)
TOTAL	14	19	50	13	96

Table 5 presents the total number of furloughs granted the various types of older male prisoners over the duration of all incarcerations up to the time of the study. Tables 6 and 7 indicate the institutional status of older inmates at the end of 1982 or the type of release from their last or most recent incarceration if they were no longer in prison. The information on institutional status is presented for older male inmates in Table 6 and older female inmates in Table 7.

Table 5 reveals that the greatest degree of furlough participation occurs among chronic offenders, prison recidivists and offenders grown old; male first offenders appear to be the least likely to be sent on furloughs. Furlough participation may be less related to length of time served (a correlate of the inmate typology) than to type of offense, institutional behavior, and inmate resources and support outside of prison. Nonetheless, even though older female inmates serve state sentences for crimes of a less serious nature than older male inmates, women disproportionately receive fewer furloughs. Eight of the ten older female inmates in the sample never received a furlough during any period of incarceration. It appears that furlough participation is contingent a number of personal and administrative factors and therefore, is not a simple indicator of institutional adjustment. Furlough participation of older inmates is presented here primarily for descriptive purposes.

According to Table 6 about a third of the older male prisoners are currently incarcerated. However, of those no longer residing in prison, the majority of older male inmates were released to the street on parole. While parole seems the predominant form of release, prison recidivists (excluding those still in prison) show a greater tendency to leave prison either by being discharged, released to another authority or escaping. The age at which inmates leave prison is fairly uniform among the four categories of older inmates. Among both males and females

Table 6

Institutional Status on December 31, 1982
or Type of Release From Last Incarceration
for Older Male Inmates

Institutional Status/Type of Release	First Offender	Chronic Offender	Prison Recidivist	Offender Grown Old	Total
In Prison	6	6	17	2	31
Parole	8	10	16	9	43
Discharge	0	1	7	0	8
Release to Other Authority	0	0	5	0	5
Escape	0	0	2	0	2
Died in Prison	0	2	3	2	7
TOTAL	14	19	50	13	96

Table 7

Institutional Status on December 31, 1982 or
Type of Release from Last Incarceration for Older Female Inmates

Institutional Status/Type of Release	First Offender	Chronic Offender	Prison Recidivist	Offender Grown Old	Total
In Prison	0	0	1	-	1
Parole	2	0	0	-	2
Discharge	1	1	1	-	3
Release to Other Authority	1	1	0	-	2
Expiration	1	1	0	-	2
TOTAL	5	3	2	0	10

who were released from their last incarceration before December, 1982, the median age at release was between age 62 and 64, and the range in age was between 60 and 77. Among those who died in prison the median age at death was 70; the youngest being age 60 and the oldest age 77. Male chronic offenders and men who have grown old are slightly more likely to die in prison than are other types of older inmates. No prison deaths occurred among first offenders even though they are incarcerated at older ages. It should be remembered, however, that first offenders serve relatively short prison terms when compared with other types of older offenders.

Female older offenders differ from males by type of release only in that relatively more of them are discharged or have their sentences expire (see Table 7). These differences are not peculiar to older women; women in general are more likely to be released from prison as a result of discharge or sentence expiration due to relatively short sentences given for county commitments.

While the types of release among the four categories of older prisoners do not vary greatly, movement between the state prison system and the state hospital for the criminally insane/sexually dangerous during the period of imprisonment reveals decided differentials among the four types of older inmates. Seventeen individuals--all men--spent some time in the State Hospital during one or more incarcerations for observation either as a sexually dangerous person or for suspected criminal insanity. One man was a first offender, two were chronic offenders, seven were prison recidivists (14%), and seven were inmates grown old (54%). The fact that over half of the inmates who had "grown old" in prison had been committed at one time or another to the state hospital indicates the high risk of such a commitment for this type of older inmate. Additionally, among the seven senior inmates who died while in prison, three had been hospitalized at the state hospital sometime during their incarceration in the state prison system.

Discussion

One of the original objectives of this research was to determine whether the bipolar typology of older offenders suggested in the literature is an adequate method for describing and classifying older inmates in the Massachusetts state correctional system. The bipolar typology has the obvious advantage of being more parsimonious than the four-way classification presented in this study.

In the case of older men, the bipolar typology has some applicability if first offenders and chronic offenders are grouped together into the "first offender" category of the bipolar typology and prison recidivists and inmate grown old combine to form the "recidivist" category of the bipolar typology. This dichomoization only makes sense, however, when describing the social background characteristics of older inmates. However, there is enough variation in the social status attributes of older inmates to recommend a fourfold typology over the categorical distinction between "first offenders" and "recidivists." A bipolar classification of a large sample of older offenders is likely to conceal differences in social status characteristics associated with prior sentences and previous time served (in any type of law enforcement facility).

The four types of older inmates appear quite dissimilar in terms of offense patterns, criminal history and types of movement within the prison system. Although the criminal histories of offenders grown old to some degree parallel those of chronic offenders and prison recidivists, their active criminal careers tend to be curtailed by long periods of incarceration. It does not appear reasonable in light of the findings on institutional experience and offense variables to collapse the four types of older inmates into a dichotomy of "first offender"

and "recidivist". The fourfold typology suggests that the presence of older people in prison is not simply a bimodal pattern of youthful offenders continuing criminal careers into old age and senior citizens with "clean records" being incarcerated for the first time when they are elderly. A recently published study (Langan and Greenfeld, 1983) that examines criminal career patterns of offenders admitted to prison during middle age produced findings which support the results of the present research.[3]

In conclusion, if further research should be conducted on older inmates, the findings from this study suggest that a fourfold typology such as the one employed in this paper would be more useful than the traditional dichotomous typology. This is especially true for older male offenders. The fourfold typology preserves a richness of information on social characteristics and criminal history which the original bipolar typology ignores. Using the fourfold typology based on age at first state incarceration and prior criminal convictions, especially if the size of the database permits, has great potential for analyzing and predicting the behavioral responses of older offenders to prison and their subsequent adjustment upon release.

The results of the study are inconclusive for older women. If the sample size had been larger, the fourfold typology might have been equally applicable to older female prisoners. However, system constraints make it difficult to draw comparable samples of male and female prisoners given differences in sentencing practi-es, typical length of sentence, and common types of offenders. Another prison system might be more suitable for testing the heuristic ability of the fourfold typology for older female prisoners.

APPENDIX

Table A

Criterion Variables by Types of Senior Male Prisoners

Criterion Variable	Conceptual Older Inmate Types			
	First Offender Type I	Chronic Offender Type II	Prison Recidivist Type III	Grown Old Type IV
Median Age at First Court Appearance	53.5	22.2	17.4	19.0
Median Age at First Incarceration	60.5	61.0	25.5	33.0
Median Age at Last Incarceration	60.5	61.0	57.7	39.0
Mean Years Served in Prison*	3.8	5.0	17.2	28.9
Mean Years Served During Last Incarceration	3.4	4.8	4.6	28.2
% With Prior County Commitment	0%	47%	74%	46%
% With Prior Massachusetts State Commitment	0%	0%	94%	62%
TOTAL # OF CASES	14	19	50	13

* Time served for all state/federal incarcerations until most recent release or until December 31, 1982, if currently in prison.

Table B

Criterion Variables By Types of Senior Female Prisoners

Criterion Variable	Conceptual Older Inmate Types		
	First Offender Type I	Chronic Offender Type II	Prison Recidivist Type III
Median Age at First Court Appearance	61.0	37.0	34.0
Median Age at First Incarceration	62.0	41.0	42.0
Median Age at Last Incarceration	62.0	64.0	67.0
Mean Years Served in Prison*	0.4	4.3	8.5
Mean Years Served During Last Incarceration	0.2	0.0	1.0
% With Prior County Commitment**	0%	33%	100%
% With Prior Massachusetts State Commitment**	0%	100%	100%
Total # of Cases	5	3	2

* Time served for all state/federal incarcerations until most recent release or until December 31, 1982, if currently in prison.

** These statistics refer to the actual confinement in a county house of correction or a state prison; they do not allow for the women serving county sentences in the state institution for women.

FOOTNOTES

1 Unless stated otherwise, charges for traffic violations and state commitments for vagrancy and drunkenness were discounted in the assignment of offenders to one of the four categories of the typology.

2 If the researchers had adhered strictly to the conceptual delineation of this category, five of the inmates in their 60's classified as "grown old" would have been eliminated from the study. Although these five inmates spent over a decade in prison serving a single sentence, they actually entered prison during early "middle age" instead of "young adulthood" (ages 18-39). Rather than discard these cases, age at first incarceration was operationalized loosely--for this category only--to include inmates incarcerated before the age of 50.

3 While the objectives and population of this study differ from those of the Langan/Greenfeld (1983) research, the findings of the two studies compliment each other. With the exception of a category of inmates comparable to the Type IV inmate in this study (offenders who have aged in prison), the Langan/Greenfeld research identify distinctive career patterns of middle aged prisoners which could easily describe the careers of the older prisoners included in this study. Unfortunately, the Bureau of Justice Statistics research was not reported until after the final writing of this paper, preventing a more thorough comparison of the two studies.

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